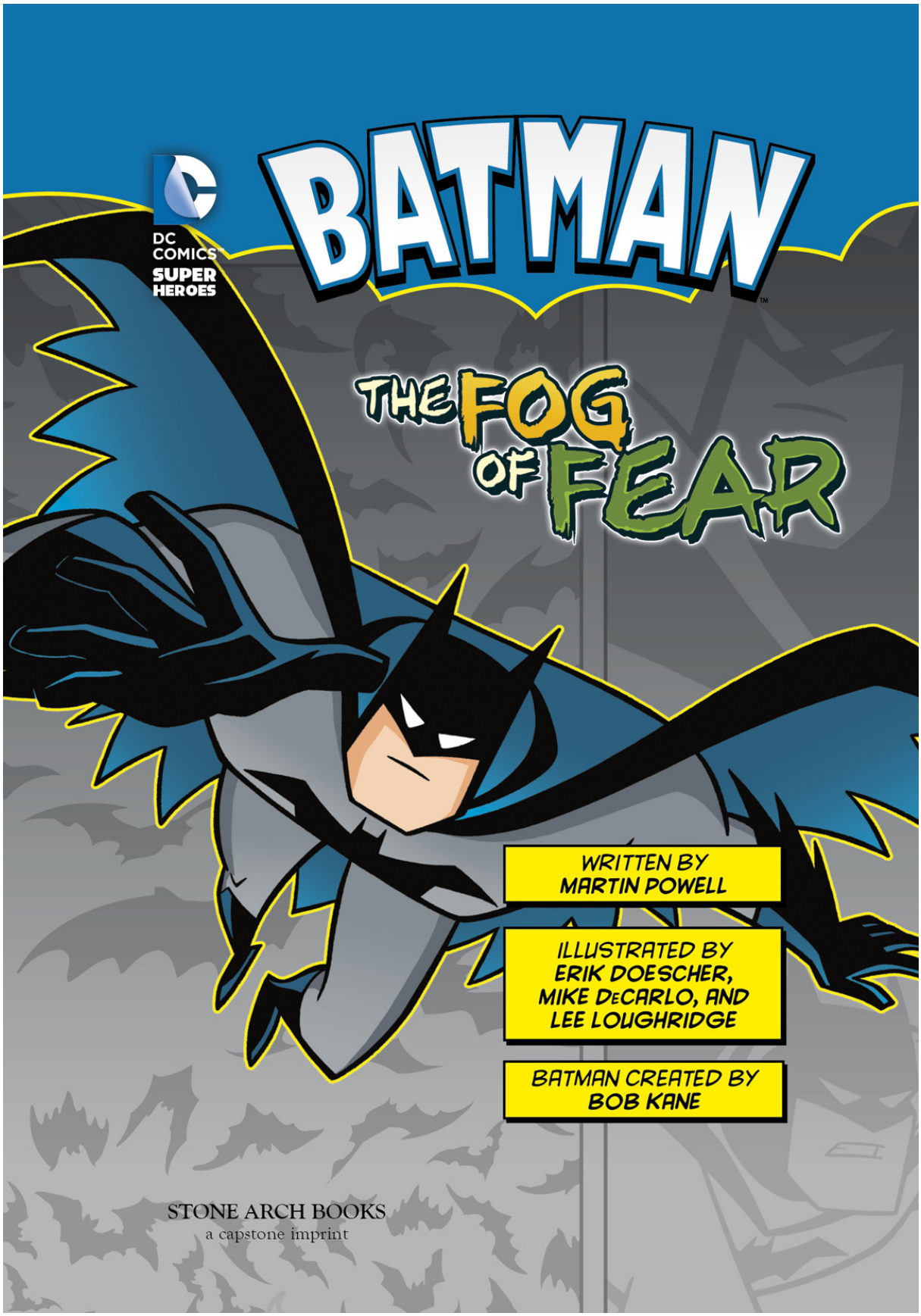
DC COMICS SUPER HEROES
BATMAN
THE FOG OF FEAR
WRITTEN BY MARTIN POWELL
ILLUSTRATED BY ERIK DOESCHER, MIKE DECARLO, AND LEE LOUGHRIDGE
BATMAN CREATED BY BOB KANE
STONE ARCH BOOKS
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1
THE FOG OF FEAR

CHAPTER 2
SINISTER SECRETS

CHAPTER 3
CLOUDED BY FEAR

CHAPTER 4
THE LIVING NIGHTMARE

CHAPTER 5
BATMAN VS MAN-BAT

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Darkness crawled across the morning sky like a giant bat from a nightmare. The residents of Gotham City stared up from the streets, or peeked out of windows, for a sign of the vanished sun. Somehow, mysteriously, it had become twilight before noon. A sudden fear of the dark gripped the entire city.

Then, a bright light sliced through the shadows. The Bat-Signal shined against the darkened clouds. It was a welcome sight for their frightened eyes.

“Never dreamed I’d have to shine the Bat-Signal in the daytime,” Commissioner Gordon said. He stood on the police department rooftop. “I hope Batman sees it … wherever he is.”

The towering smokestacks of the Gotham City power plant spit a thick cloud of black fog high above the skyline. Creating its own eclipse, the darkness draped over the panicked streets. It grew like a great uncoiling snake. Before long, the bright morning spring air was as dark as midnight.

The citizens of Gotham would have been even more afraid, if they’d seen the figure atop the highest smokestack. Dressed in tatters and thin as a

skeleton, the weird being shed small scraps of straw with every footstep.

He pulled a glowing jack-o'-lantern from a bag in his hand. He had already tossed several others down into the smoldering smokestack. The ragged man cackled a laugh like the sound of breaking glass.

"Trick or treat, Gotham City," the Scarecrow cried, ready to drop a pumpkin into the next chimney. "Today is Halloween — six months early!"

Suddenly, a Batarang flew through the air and knocked the pumpkin out of the Scarecrow's grasp. A black-cloaked creature appeared out of nowhere, his eyes burning white-hot through the slits of his cowl.

"Not in my city," the Batman said.

Now it was the Scarecrow's turn to be afraid.

"Too late, Batman!" the Scarecrow shrieked. "You've lost already!"

Flinging his sleeves, the Scarecrow threw a clump of stinging straw into Batman's face. Like a bundle of living rags, the villain dashed around the narrow rim of the smokestack. Escape was the only thing on his evil mind.

Gripping a hooked rope, the Scarecrow prepared for his descent. Twice, he rapidly glanced behind. His eyes grew wide with surprise through the holes of his mask. Where was Batman? Among the drifting ribbons of the thick fog the Scarecrow's enemy was nowhere to be seen.

The Scarecrow quickly hurried down the long rope. An evil smile crossed his lips. Had Batman fallen to his doom? Perhaps he was finally rid of his enemy forever.

Fast as lightning, a Batarang struck the Scarecrow's glove. His fingers released the rope. The villain waved his arms helplessly and fell toward the earth below.

Batman appeared through the curtain of darkness, swinging on his Batrope. His cape flapped in the wind. In a single motion, the Caped Crusader snatched the Scarecrow from his fall.

"Don't be afraid, Scarecrow," Batman said. He gripped a small device on the rope that lowered them both gently to the ground. "I'll make sure you're safe," he said, "inside a strong jail cell."

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Commissioner Gordon paced anxiously. His shoes scraped the tarred rooftop of Police Headquarters. The creeping darkness of the Scarecrow's black fog still covered the streets in shadows. Gordon was beginning to fear for his city.

"You're sure this stuff isn't poisonous, Batman?" the Commissioner asked.

The Dark Knight was standing near him on the edge of the rooftop. His fluttering cape blended with the black fog.

"My lab tests confirm that this fog is not poisonous," Batman replied. "Because it's heavier than air, it will linger in Gotham City until the wind carries it out to sea. The weather will change in our favor in a few days. Until then, everyone has to get used to living in the shadows."

Commissioner Gordon frowned at the dark fog.

"That's easy for you to say, Batman," he said. "Still, I feel sorry for anyone scared of the dark."

Batman’s eyes narrowed. “That’s just it,” he said. “The Scarecrow works through fear. Even after I captured him at the power plant, he seemed strangely sure of himself. It’s as if he still has some fearful secret that I haven’t solved yet.”

“Gotham City is safe because of you,” said Commissioner Gordon. “At least the threat of the Scarecrow is over, and he is safely locked up.”

The Dark Knight shook his head thoughtfully. “It’s not over yet, old friend,” he said quietly.

“That’s just what I’m afraid of,” said the commissioner.

• • •

It was always dark in the Batcave, secretly located beneath Wayne Manor. Later that afternoon, inside the hidden cavern, Batman removed his cape and cowl, revealing the face of billionaire Bruce Wayne. Wayne peered into a high-powered microscope. He fought a yawn, rubbed his tired eyes, and got back to work.

Behind Bruce rose a tall, dark set of stairs. Alfred the butler was coming down the stairs into the underground laboratory. “Miss Kyle called, Master Bruce. She’s waiting to meet you for lunch at the restaurant,” said Alfred.

Bruce prepared a thin orange-colored slice upon a glass slide. He added a drop of a glowing chemical.

“Call her back with my apologies, Alfred,” he said. “It’s going to be dark as night in Gotham City for the next few days. Commissioner Gordon’s policemen are working 24-hour shifts. Batman can do no less.”

Alfred peeked over Bruce’s shoulder. He stared at a strange orange vegetable sitting on the table.

“Isn’t it a bit early for carving pumpkins, sir?” Alfred asked.

Bruce smiled. “This belonged to the Scarecrow,” he explained. “He filled these pumpkins with a secret chemical before tossing them into the power plant smokestacks. The result was the black fog that is still plaguing the city.”

“Well, sir,” offered Alfred, “I’ll admit this fog is troubling. However, it’s hardly the same kind of trick the Scarecrow has used against you in the past.”

Bruce rose quickly, grabbing his black cowl and cloak. “Exactly,” he said. Bruce filled the compartments of his Utility Belt. “There’s more to this black fog than meets the eye. And, one way or the other, the Scarecrow is going to tell me its secret.”

Arkham Asylum was like a madhouse from another world. Locked within its electrified iron gates lived the deadliest criminals ever known. Even in the daylight, the building looked like a bad dream. The black fog added even more to its eeriness.

The headlights of the Batmobile sliced through the inky clouds of fog. The front guards saluted as Batman stepped out of the vehicle. He passed into the dreadful place without a word. Caged doors opened before him with a motorized hum. The Dark Knight knew his way through the twisted corridors all too well.

“If I’d known you were coming, I’d have baked a Bat-cake!” a voice giggled from behind a cell door.

Batman stopped and glared at the white face pressed against the bars.

“Joker,” he said through gritted teeth.

The Joker’s blood-red lips continued to curl upward toward his yellow eyes. Batman’s face remained like stone, unsmiling. Upon reflex, his gloved fists tightly clenched.

“Hey, Bats! When are you gonna bring back the sunshine?” the Joker said. A chuckle hissed between his teeth.

“What’s the matter, Joker?” asked Batman. “Afraid of the dark?”

“You gotta be kidding, Bat-brain!” the killer clown gleefully cried. “I just want to know when you’re gonna ruin the Scarecrow’s party! He’s been raving about his ‘Crime of the Century’ for hours. Such a bore. Frankly, just between us boys, I think he’s nutty as a filbert!”

Batman whirled from the cell. He had to focus on the problem at hand. The mystery of the Scarecrow was waiting to be solved.

Jonathan Crane had once been a brilliant professor of psychology. He specialized in the study of fear. That was before his mind snapped and he turned to crime. As the Scarecrow, Crane had always been defeated by Batman, no matter how ingenious his crimes. This time Crane was certain things were going to be different.

Crane looked almost harmless without his fearsome costume. Tall and thin with an evil smirk on his face, he sat in his cell quietly reading. Batman studied him silently for several minutes.

“I’m only going to ask you this once, Crane,” the Dark Knight warned. “What’s the secret of the black fog?”

Crane continued reading, as if he'd heard nothing. Then he smugly smiled.

"You'll know soon enough, Batman," the evil genius replied. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm trying to broaden my mind."

Batman's brain worked at top speed. He read the titles of the volumes on Crane's crammed bookshelves. Many of the books were old. Some were ancient. Most of them seemed to be about the so-called "four elements": fire, water, earth, and air. Hundreds of years ago, men called alchemists believed that the world was made of just these four ingredients.

Could Crane's formula be related to the four elements? wondered Batman.

Immediately, the Dark Knight had the answer.

‘Earth’ would equal the jack-o’-lanterns. ‘Fire’ was added from the power plant smokestacks. ‘Air’ joined the mix, forming the black fog. One element was missing: A single ingredient that would turn the black fog deadly.

“Water!” Batman exclaimed.

Batman’s blood ran cold. His sharp ears caught the rumble of an approaching thunderstorm.

From out of Crane’s thin lips came the Scarecrow’s awful laugh.

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Commission Gordon leaned against his office desk to steady himself. The news Batman had brought was shocking. Gordon knew that the Dark Knight was almost never wrong.

“If what you’re saying is true, Batman,” he said, “then all of Gotham is about to be scared to death!”

“There’s no doubt about it,” Batman assured him. “When I visited Scarecrow’s cell, I solved the mystery of his plan. I detected the poison in his formula.”

“Once this black fog is mixed with water,” Batman continued, “all who breathe it will experience their most dreadful fears. Unless we act quickly, the city is doomed to be trapped forever inside their worst nightmares.”

Gordon went to the window and glanced outside. It was just past three o’clock in the afternoon, yet the sky was still dark as midnight. The Bat-Signal was still burning against the black clouds, just as the Commissioner had ordered. Its presence gave looters and other criminals second thoughts. The Bat-Signal also gave hope to Gotham City’s honest citizens.

The approaching thunderstorm growled in the distance. Jagged shards of lightning flashed on the horizon.

“This coming storm will drench the city in terror,” Gordon said. He thumped his fist hard against the sill. “Is there anything that can be done?”

Batman nodded. “We can clean the air of the black fog before the rain begins,” he said. He sounded confident, in spite of the odds against him.

Commissioner Gordon spun on his heels. He greatly respected his friend, but this idea sounded impossible.

“But how, Batman?” he asked. “You said that there won’t be enough wind in Gotham for days. How can we possibly speed up Mother Nature?”

The Caped Crusader moved to the window and opened it. He fired a grapple and rope to a neighboring building.

“With our courage and our wits,” Batman remarked.

He swung away, disappearing into the murky air.

Batman swooped high above the streets of Gotham City. People down below saw the shadow of a huge bat flying through the strange fog. None of them knew it was really the Caped Crusader.

Batman used his rope and grappling device to swing from building to building. His goal was a tall, white skyscraper near the edge of the city.

Inside the building was a high-tech laboratory owned by one of the world's greatest scientists, Dr. Kirk Langstrom. Batman hoped that Langstrom's science would be strong enough to defeat the Scarecrow's evil formula.

As the Dark Knight swooped through the fog, tiny water droplets collected on his armored suit. The mist pressed cold and damp against his cowl.

Without warning, Batman's rope changed shape. Instead of a thin silken cord, he was holding onto a deadly boa constrictor.

"What —?" yelled Batman. He released his grip on the snake and began to fall.

Batman shot a grappling hook toward another nearby building.

Just in time, the new rope pulled him upward. He barely missed hitting a statue coming out from the side of an office building.

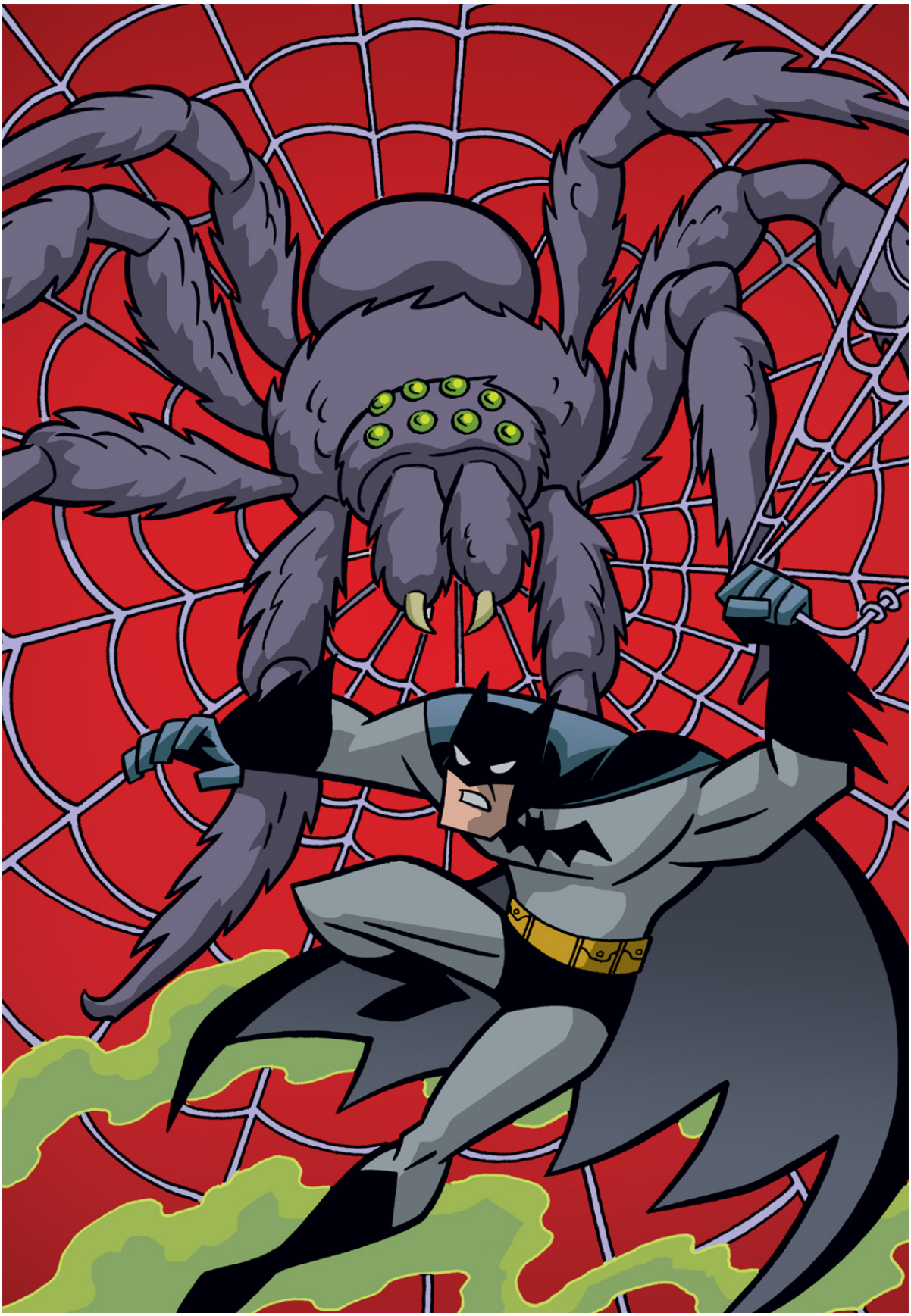
That was close, thought Batman. *But what is going on?*

Again, his rope transformed. This time it turned into a super sticky web. A monstrous spider snapped its drooling jaws. Its giant head thrust toward the startled hero.

“You can’t be real,” said Batman, shaking his head. He shot out his feet and swung quickly around his rope, building up speed. Then he aimed his boots at the fearsome mouth of the spider. Instead of feeling the impact, Batman’s feet met nothing but air.

It’s an illusion, he thought. *It must be the mist. There’s just enough water in the air to combine with the black smoke and make me see things.*

Batman frowned. *If this is how the Scarecrow’s fog can affect the brain with just a little water, then the rainstorm will create a total panic.*



Batman increased his speed and swung toward the white skyscraper. Things were worse than he imagined.

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“I knew I could count on you, Kirk,” Batman said. He shook the scientist’s hand.

Kirk Langstrom stood in his white lab coat, a deep contrast to Batman’s black and grey Batsuit. Still, the two men shared at least two traits. Both were brilliant. Both wanted to save their city.

“You cured me, Batman. I owe you everything,” Langstrom replied. “When I experimented with the bat-serum, I turned into the monster, Man-Bat.”

“You were the only one who helped me,” said Langstrom. “I’ll never forget that.”

The Dark Knight remembered those frightening nights when his friend had changed into a powerful creature. Although not truly evil, the Man-Bat was wild and uncontrollable. Those memories were like a nightmare to both men.

“This is Gotham’s only hope,” Batman stated. “You are the world’s greatest living expert on bats.”

“Takes one to know one, I guess,” Langstrom said. He smiled, almost sadly, as he unveiled his experimental machine.

The device on Langstrom’s laboratory workbench looked like something from a science-fiction movie. It was made of blinking lights and coiling wires.

Batman noticed that Langstrom himself stared at the machine with dread. As much as the scientist wanted to help, he was still hiding something.

“I haven’t tested it yet,” Langstrom said quietly. “But if it works, the machine should send out a high-pitch sound. The sound can only be heard by the sensitive ears of bats. Bats are the most common mammal in North America. Millions of them will be awakened by this sound, flying to wherever it leads them.”

Batman was impressed. The machine was exactly what he needed.

“That’s all I need to know,” he said, reaching for the device.

The Dark Knight slowly flipped a small switch.

The machine glowed, then started to hum. Although Batman could feel only a slight vibration in the air, Langstrom's ears immediately began to ache.

Within minutes, hundreds of bats swooped and fluttered against the window of the lab.

"It works!" cried Langstrom.

Batman turned off the machine, well satisfied.

"It's perfect, Kirk," he said. "I have just enough time to get this machine back to the Batcave before the thunderstorm starts."

There was an eerie silence in the room. Langstrom had retreated into a far corner, away from the harsh light in the lab.

Batman was alarmed by the sounds of the scientist's heavy breaths. He took a step toward his friend.

"Kirk? Are you all right?" he asked.

No answer came from the dark corner. Then Batman heard the sounds of more rapid breathing. He heard a slow ripping of cloth. Then he saw a sudden spreading of monstrous wings.

The Man-Bat had returned. Langstrom had been transformed by the effect of his sound machine!

The Dark Knight braced himself as he saw the burning red eyes glare at him. The creature sprang forward. Batman was driven back by the muscular weight of the monster. He crashed backwards through tables of shattering glass.

The beast's claws gripped Batman's throat with a blur of motion. Sharp teeth gleamed behind the gruesome growl. Batman's brain was spinning, close to blacking out. His gloved fingers groped for his Utility Belt, his only chance.

A bright flare shined in Batman's hand. The Man-Bat howled in rage. It flung itself through the window.

The Dark Knight caught his breath. He watched the Man-Bat escape into the gloomy sky, carried by its giant wings. “You feared this would happen, didn’t you?” Batman said to himself. “Kirk, why didn’t you tell me?”

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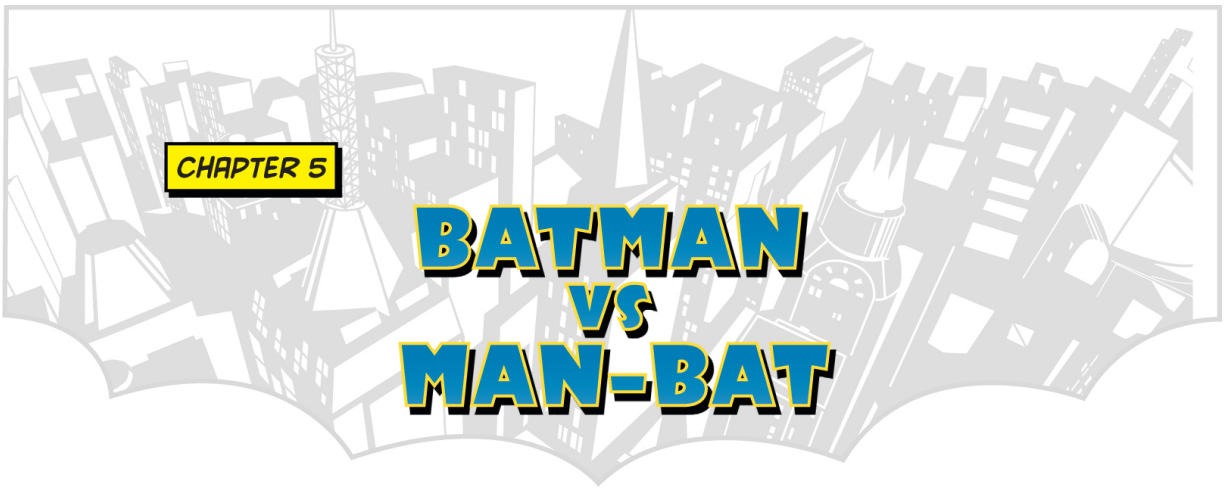

Less than an hour later, the Batplane screamed out of the Gotham sky. The storm was almost upon the city. There wasn't a moment to lose.

Kirk Langstrom's amazing invention was wired into an amplifier within the plane's cockpit. All Batman needed to do was press the switch … and hope.

The sound was much too high for the Dark Knight's human ears. Several minutes passed before he knew for sure that it was operating. Then, suddenly, there they were.

"Bats!"

The bats obeyed the sound machine, following close behind the Batplane. They came in an endless stream, thousands and thousands of them. Countless tiny wings flapped through the air. Soon, the black fog softened to a grey. The sky was alive with the swarm of fluttering wings.

The Batplane streaked through the clouds. It rocketed above rooftops and sliced between buildings. The bats followed, sweeping away the fog

with every beat of their leathery wings. In a few minutes the Scarecrow's black fog was no more.

Batman turned off the sound machine. The swarm of bats cleared the skies and returned to their hidden lairs. The Dark Knight was about to breathe a sigh of relief when another threat struck from the sky.

Something hard collided against the hull of the Batplane. Batman saw the jagged wings and glowing eyes of his attacker.

The Man-Bat had also answered the call of the machine. In a mindless rage, the Man-Bat struck the Batplane. Batman fought hard to regain control. He had to take this battle down to the ground, out of the Man-Bat's element. His sharp eyes found a safe place to land — an old cemetery outside of the city.

The Batplane glided down among the twisted trees and tombstones. It came to a stop just as the rain started to fall.

Leaping from the cockpit, Batman peered skyward. The rain poured down, making it hard to see.

The Man-Bat was fast and strong. The Dark Knight knew he would only get one chance to defeat the beast.

A furious flash of lightning revealed the Man-Bat, swooping out of the sky like a prehistoric monster. Batman dropped and rolled away as the creature's deadly talons grabbed only mud. Again the flying fiend shot toward Batman like a demon, but its claws found only open air. A spinning kick to the creature's chest finally brought the Man-Bat to earth.

The monster rose up from the mud, towering above Batman. Pain and hatred grew in Man-Bat's mind. It let out a terrible snarl. Batman's right

hand went to his Utility Belt, retrieving an item, which he hid behind his glove.

“Kirk!” Batman said. He tried to calm the beast. “I want to help you. Kirk, don’t you know me?”

The Man-Bat’s wild eyes softened a moment. The creature tilted its head in confusion. Batman approached the creature slowly. Deadly as Man-Bat might be, Batman had to get close enough to touch.

A sudden clap of thunder startled the beast.

Its clawed wings wrapped tightly around Batman’s throat. Nothing could break the monstrous grip. It was too strong. But the Dark Knight’s right hand was free, and that was all he needed. He made a quick move, pressing a sharp object against the creature’s hide.

The Man-Bat released its stranglehold in a snap. It appeared to grow dizzy and staggered. Finally, it dropped to its shaggy knees.

The Batman returned the object to his Utility Belt. It was a needle that had contained the antidote to the Man-Bat formula.

Before Batman's eyes, the giant beast seemed to shrink. Its fur slowly melted away. The huge wings grew smaller and disappeared. In a few moments, scientist Kirk Langstrom crouched in the creature's place. Batman carefully helped his friend stand.

"Batman?" Langstrom asked. "What have I done?" He remembered nothing from the past few hours.

Batman placed a grateful hand on Langstrom's shoulder. "You saved the city, Kirk," he said softly. "The black fog is gone, blown away by the wings of bats. Your machine worked just as you said. You're a hero."

The storm was over. The rain had ended, and the Scarecrow's evil nightmares vanished with the coming sunshine.

"I had a terrible dream about Man-Bat," said Langstrom, confused. "I was afraid he had come back. Afraid he'd try to hurt you."

Batman smiled. "Nothing to be afraid of now," he said.

It was going to be a beautiful day in Gotham City.

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Scarecrow, The

REAL NAME: Professor Jonathan Crane

OCCUPATION: Professional Criminal

BASE: Gotham City

HEIGHT:
6 feet

WEIGHT:
140 pounds

EYES:
Blue

HAIR:
Brown

Jonathan Crane’s obsession with fear took hold at an early age. Terrorized by bullies, Crane sought to free himself of his own worst fears. As he researched the subject of dread, Crane developed a strong understanding of fear. Using this knowledge, Crane overcame his tormentors by using their worst fears against them. This victory led to his transformation into the ultra-creepy super-villain, the Scarecrow.

G.C.P.D. GOTHAM CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

- *Crane became a professor at Gotham University to further his terrifying research. But when his colleagues took notice of his twisted experiments, they had him fired. To get revenge, Crane became the Scarecrow to try to frighten his enemies to death.*

- *Crane doesn't use conventional weaponry. Instead, he invented a Fear Toxin that causes his victims to hallucinate, bringing their worst fears and phobias to life. The gas makes the weak and gangly Crane look like a fearsome predator in the eyes of his prey.*

- *Even though he preys on the fears of others, the Scarecrow has a fear of his own — bats! Crane has been chiropteraphobic, or afraid of bats, since his first encounter with the Dark Knight.*

- *Crane's mastery of fear has come in handy. While locked up in Arkham Asylum, Crane escaped from his cell by scaring two guards into releasing him!*

BIOGRAPHIES

Martin Powell has been a freelance writer since 1986. He has written hundreds of stories. In 1989, Powell received an Eisner Award nomination for his graphic novel *Scarlet in Gaslight.*

Erik Doescher is an illustrator and video game designer based in Dallas, Texas. He attended the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Erik illustrated for a number of comic studios, and then moved to Texas to pursue videogame development and design. However, he has not given up on illustrating his favorite comic book characters.

Mike DeCarlo is a longtime contributor of comic art whose range extends from Batman and Iron Man to Bugs Bunny and Scooby-Doo. He resides in Connecticut with his wife and four children.

Lee Loughridge has been working in comics for over 14 years. He currently lives in sunny California in a tent on the beach.

GLOSSARY

antidote (AN-ti-dote)—something that stops a poison, or negative effect, from working

descent (di-SENT)—a climb down or to go down to a lower level

flare (FLAIR)—to burn with a sudden, bright light

illusion (i-LOO-zhuhn)—something that appears real but does not actually exist

plaguing (PLAYG-ing)—troubling or afflicting

shattering (SHAT-ur-ing)—breaking into tiny pieces

transformed (trans-FORMD)—changed into something else

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Scarecrow preys on his victim's worst fears. Do you have a fear? What are some things that lots of people are afraid of?

2. Why do you think people feel fear? Can fear ever be a good thing? Why or why not?

3. Batman and Kirk Langstrom work together to protect the city of Gotham. What makes a good team? Can you think of other ways the duo could have stopped Scarecrow's plan?

WRITING PROMPTS

1. Batman is a super hero. If you were Batman, how would you fight crime? Who would you ask for help? Write a story about your adventures as Batman.

2. Batman's friend, Kirk, turns into Man-Bat. If you could turn into any animal, which would you choose? Why? Draw a picture of yourself as a half-animal, half-human.

3. Graphic novels are often written and illustrated by two different artists. Write a story, and then give it to a friend to illustrate.

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Summary: On a bright spring morning, a dark cloud of smoke engulfs Gotham City. The fearsome Scarecrow has turned day into night. Surprisingly, the crook doesn't resist Batman's attempt to arrest him. From behind the bars of his cell, the Scarecrow reveals that his evil experiment has already been set in motion. When the black smoke mixes with water, it produces a gas that fills people with fear. A thunderstorm is approaching the city. Can Batman save the citizens of Gotham from their worst nightmares?

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Designer: Brann Garvey

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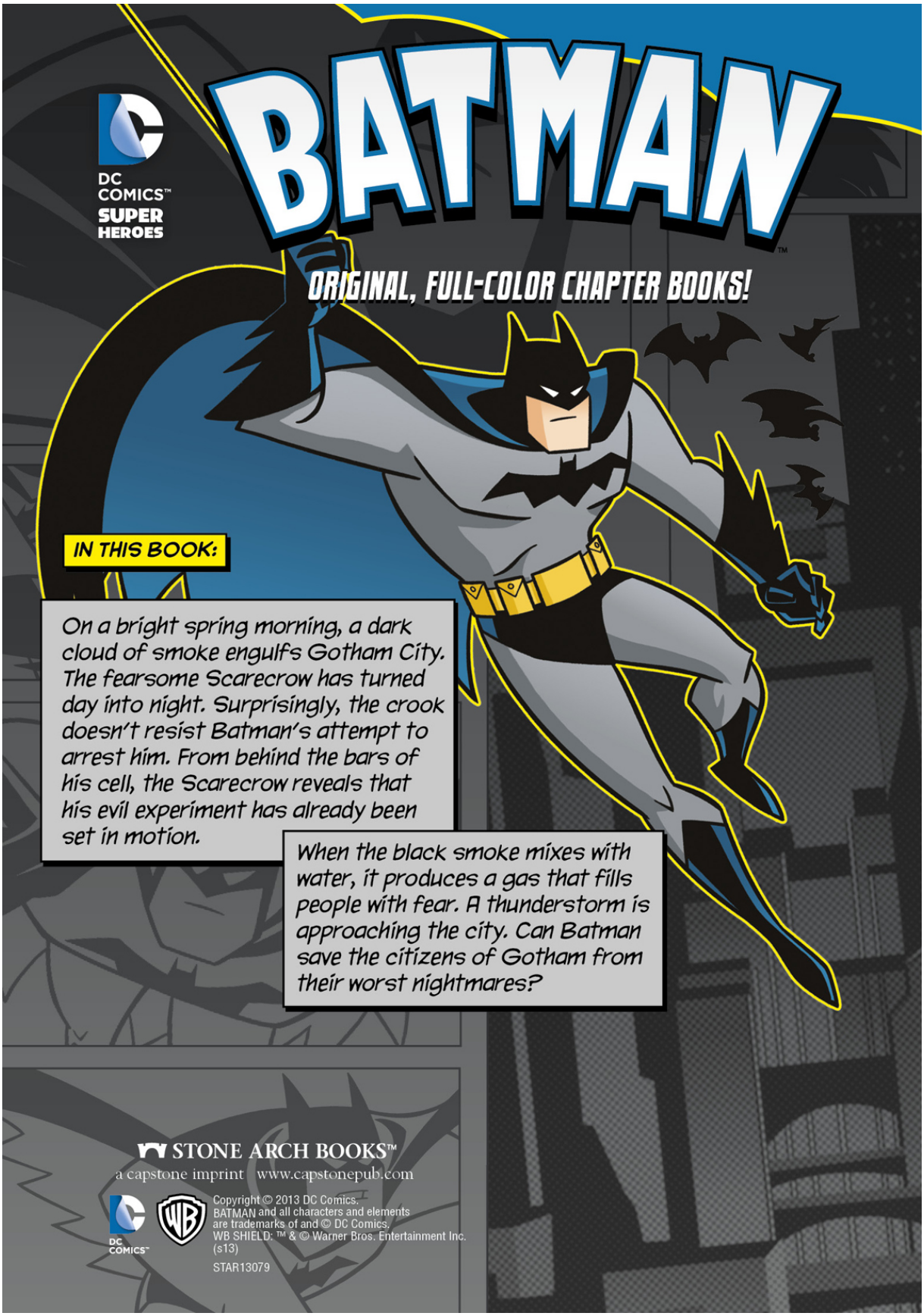
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